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The UTC regulates the services of privately or investor owned utility and transportation companies. Our mission is to ensure that services are fairly priced, available, reliable and safe.

**Regulated companies:**

- Telephone
- Electricity
- Natural Gas
- Water
- Garbage
- Recycling
- Residential Movers
- Charter Buses
- Airport Shuttles
- Commercial Ferries
- Natural Gas Pipelines
- Railroad Safety

**General Information**

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## New Stopping Requirements at Railroad Crossings

The primary responsibility of the Utilities and Transportation Commission's (UTC) Rail Safety program is to make sure that grade crossings, where roads and highways cross railroad tracks, are as safe as possible.

On June 10, 2010, a new law went into effect requiring all commercial motor vehicles transporting passengers or hazardous materials to stop at all highway-railroad grade crossings, with few exceptions (listed below). Drivers are required to stop, listen and look for approaching trains and signals indicating the approach of a train before proceeding. This is a change from the previous law which only required commercial motor vehicles to stop at grade crossings that were not protected by automatic signals.

### Exceptions

The primary reason for the new law is to make Washington State law consistent with the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) relating to commercial motor vehicle operators. Both state law and the CFR contain some exceptions to the stopping requirements. The law does not apply to any railroad crossing where:

- The UTC has approved the installation of an "exempt" sign.
- Traffic is controlled by a police officer or flagger.
- A functioning traffic control signal is transmitting a green light.
- The UTC has approved the installation of an "exempt" sign in accordance with the procedures and standards under [RCW 81.53.060](#).
- The tracks are used exclusively for a streetcar or industrial switching purposes.
- The crossing is abandoned and is marked with a sign indicating it is out of service.
- The Washington State Patrol has, by rule, identified a crossing where stopping is not required.
- The Superintendent of Public Instruction has, by rule, identified a circumstance under which a school bus or private carrier bus carrying any school child or other passenger is not required to stop.

# New Stopping Requirements at Railroad Crossings

## **Petitions for Exemption**

Exempt signs are intended to inform drivers of commercial motor vehicles transporting passengers or hazardous materials that a stop is not required at certain designated railroad crossings, except when rail traffic is approaching or occupying the crossing or the driver's view is blocked.

In Washington State, the UTC is the only governmental entity authorized to approve installation of exempt signs. Currently, the only parties that can petition the UTC to exempt a railroad crossing are the road authority (typically a county or city) and the railroad.

Once a petition is received, the UTC investigates whether public safety standards are met or maintained by the proposed change. The UTC considers such factors as number and speed of vehicles crossing the railroad tracks; number and speed of trains; the geometry at the crossing (e.g. crossing angle, elevations, width of the crossing, type of crossing surface, number and type of tracks); sight distance for both train and vehicle operators; whether pedestrians use the crossing; and the accident history at the crossing. UTC staff are a key part of the process, along with the railroad and road authority.

For more information visit the UTC website at [www.utc.wa.gov](http://www.utc.wa.gov).

## **For more information**

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